

# Principi della Mindfulness: il Buddismo e la Psicologia Costruttivista

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# Constructivist & Mindfulness approaches to psychotherapy

Both show current growth of interest

Can Buddhist-inspired mindfulness methods enhance constructivist psychotherapy?

Theoretically Progressive Integrationism

- Shared metatheoretical assumptions as a basis for including particular interventions
- Constructivism & Buddhism share metatheoretical assumptions



# Overview of Presentation

- Describe constructivist & Buddhist assumptions and approaches to dysfunction and psychotherapy
- Demonstrate metatheoretical similarity and compatible views of human dysfunction
- Describe therapeutic approaches that incorporate mindfulness, awareness, and acceptance
- Discuss their relevance for constructivist psychotherapy's theoretically progressive integration



# Constructivist Metatheory

Foundationalism: failed

Constructionism: the best alternative

- Universe: integral, interconnected, flux, lacking essence
- Humans impose meaning, structure
- Beliefs evolve in context, conventions
- Constraints: not “anything goes”
- Pragmatic truth criteria

# Constructivist view of dysfunction & well-being

Meaning-making system:

- useful for prediction
- may impede goals, considering alternatives
- Kelly's definition of disorder: understanding repeatedly used despite consistent invalidation

Well-being:

- identities and interpretations
- lead to effective anticipation of events
- revise interpretations in response to effectiveness



# Constructivist Psychotherapy

- Focus on client's experience
- Challenge existing constructions
- Examine language, social, cultural factors in meaning
- Explore narratives, life metaphors
- Assist reconstruction of life story, identities
- Experiment with alternative meanings
- Try new enactments

# Buddhist Psychology





# De-Mystifying Buddhism

- Siddhartha Gautama: fallible, ordinary human being
- Rejected theism, claimed no divinity
- Teachings: no deity, creator, supreme being
- No dogma, creed, or beliefs requiring faith
- No one to worship, no magic, savior, miracles
- No immortal self
- Avoid irresolvable metaphysical concepts
- This world here and now, not afterlife
- Do not *believe* the teachings--try them yourself





# Buddhist Psychology Metatheory

Characteristics of phenomena:

- Dependent origination
- Impermanence
- Emptiness (without essence)

No “Thing” exists

- Cannot know ultimate reality
- Can use human convention
- Constraints on our conventions



# Buddhist view of Self

A social and personal construction

- Dependent, Impermanent, Empty

Five composites (elements, modalities, *skhandas*):

- Body
- Sensations
- Perceptions & cognitions
- Predispositions & volitions
- Consciousness

Always changing, nothing to point to as “self”

- We create sense of location, reality of self

# Buddhist view of dysfunction

Confuse:

- relative, dependent, impermanent, empty conventions
- with ultimate, inherent truth and reality

Reify concepts: self, objects, values, beliefs

- Believe meaning requires real self, world, values
- Attempt to impose permanence, essence

Paradoxically, emptiness really enables purpose in life



# Mental Proliferation

- Mental response to sensations & perceptions
- Experience of attraction & aversion
- Emotional agitation, automatic, reflexive responses
- Construct ideas and beliefs about reality
- Sensory contact leads to biased suppositions
- Develop concepts and views of “objects”
- Applies to self (I, me, mine, myself)
- Treat them as real

# Buddha's 4 Noble Truths

## 4 “Ennobling” Propositions

- Life includes dissatisfaction, suffering (*duhkha*)
- Dissatisfaction results from human mind: craving, attachment, clinging to desires, expectations (the 3 poisons: greed, anger, & ignorance)
- Relief of dissatisfaction comes from letting go of clinging, desire, attachment
- Disciplines and methods (meditation, mindfulness, awareness) can help reducing clinging, eliminate attachment, and disrupt mental proliferation




# Buddhist Idea of Well-Being

## Nirvana

- Not a mystical or metaphysical state
- *This life*: joy, tranquility, serenity, imperturbability

## Mental Balance

- Conation: intention, volition, goals
- Attention: mindful, voluntary
- Cognition: engaging with moment-to-moment experience without preconception
- Affect: equanimity, no apathy, vacillation, inappropriate emotions



# Meditation: mindfulness, awareness, acceptance

Cultivating awareness of the present moment

- See process of self & identity, conventions
- Comprehending impermanence
- Experience emptiness
- Liberation from dogma, clinging to reified concepts
- Awareness of the process of creating constructs, reifying, developing a worldview



# Experience of the Moment

Sounds simple, but we don't always like it

We filter experience: likes and dislikes

Shift attention from the mental to awareness of physical sensations and thoughts

- Focus & concentration
- Observing and labeling thoughts
- Experiencing bodily sensations
- Attending to emotional reactions





# Elaborating Mindfulness

“A receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 212)

- Awareness: consciously registering sensations
- Attention: noticing experience, treating thoughts as phenomena in consciousness
- Mindful: clear, non-conceptual, flexible, stable, present-oriented
- Intention: “on purpose”, why practice?
- Attitude: accepting, open, receptive, no judgment



# Elaborating Mindfulness (continued)

Intentional Awareness of sensory experiences:

- Internal and External
- Momentary, changing
- Physical sensations, Thoughts

Willingness to experience those experiences

- Receptive, accepting, curious
- Without judgment, evaluation, trying to change



# Buddhist-inspired Therapy

- Attending to the *process* of thinking and feeling rather than the *content* of thoughts and labels of feelings
- Emphasizing difference between *changing* mental content and gaining *awareness* of mental processes
- Developing client's ability to observe thoughts
  - label, acknowledge, experience, let go
- Cultivating direct experience and bare attention
- Allow experiences without clinging or trying to change
- Seeing through the “delusion” of a fixed self

# Convivial Psychotherapy

## Approaches

### Constructivist-Based Approaches

- Context centered psychotherapy (Jay Efran)
- Experiential personal construct therapy (Larry Leitner)

### Buddhist-Inspired Approaches

- Mindfulness based cognitive therapy (Jon Kabat-Zinn)
- Identity Systems and Bridging (Stan Block)

### A Behavioral-Contextual Approach

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Steven Hayes)

# Context-Centered Psychotherapy

(Efran et al., 1990)

- Life inherently meaningless, create our own meaning
- See narratives as empty, beliefs (not “reality”)
- Address the *context* of presuppositions that operate in the background to see how thought processes work
- See “mind” as a component of self, not the whole
- Distinguish “mind” (self-centered) from “self” (connection)
- Notice, acknowledge, accept mind’s operations, not change their content
- Join client’s self in “taming” overactive mind
- Shift from smaller context of mind to larger context of self



# Experiential Personal Construct Therapy

(Leitner & Thomas, 2003)

- Verbalized constructs shift focus from bodily experience
- Awareness of present includes bodily experiences
- Moving from living in beliefs to direct immediate experience of physical sensations & thoughts
- Focus on how personal meaning making processes manifest directly in bodily sensations and events
- Use exercises to help clients develop greater bodily awareness, explore blocks to bodily experience
- Relaxation and mindfulness training can help draw connection between bodily processes and meaning

# Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

(Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002, 2004; Teasdale, 1999)

- Distinguish between metacognitive *knowledge* (CBT) and metacognitive *insight*
- Experience thoughts as events in awareness, rather than reflecting external reality
- Distinguish *specific* meanings from *generic*
- View thoughts, feelings as ever-changing events
- Change *relationship* to thoughts, not *content*
- Experience specific thoughts and feelings as they appear
- Recognize self-perpetuating patterns of negative thoughts
- Distinguish “doing mode” (shoulds, oughts), and “being mode” of acceptance, allowing thoughts to pass through awareness



# Human Identity System (HIS) & Bridging

(Block, 2005)

- HIS evolves into self-centered, rigid, exclusive system that restricts ability to attend to actual experience.
- “Requirements” similar to core constructs
- Self as damaged, defective, events must meet requirement
- Bridging: shift awareness from HIS to immediate sensations
- Bridging exercises: attend to sounds, sensations, “Channel Me” storylines, Mind-Body Mapping (word picture of HIS)
- Places HIS on “idle”, “befriends” its requirements
- Observe HIS components: “depressor” & “fixer”



# Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

(ACT) (Hayes, et al, 1999; 2004)

- Well-elaborated, Buddhist, Behavioral, Contextual
- Verbal evaluations and comparison amplify suffering
- People avoid upsetting sensations, emotion, thoughts
- Psychological health: living with chosen values & in contact with immediate sensations, thoughts, feelings
- Increase acceptance of experience, make personal choices, take appropriate action
- Weaken avoidance; Accept troublesome sensations, feelings, and thoughts willingly
- Contact a self that transcends ever-changing thoughts and sensations, clarify values, commit to action.

# Constructivist Psychotherapy

## Progressive Theoretical Integration

### Compatibility of assumptions

- Incorporate mindfulness, awareness, acceptance in constructivist therapy?

### Personal Scientist Metaphor

- Well-being as interpretations that lead to validated anticipations and revision
- Benefit from mental balance, awareness of change, seeing essenceless nature of phenomena



# Mind-Sets for effective functioning

Creating meaningful hypotheses

- Clear articulation of appropriate goals
- Understanding realistic desires, fulfillment
- Sustained focused attention
- Clear observation
- Mindful monitoring of mental states



# Effective functioning

Openness to experiencing events clearly without assumptions

- Attend to present experience
- Accepting actual experience
- Equanimity, empathy, compassion
- Consider alternatives
- Focus on *process* rather than *content*



# Conclusion

Elaborating Constructivism

Enhancing the effective Personal Scientist

- Mindfulness
- Awareness
- Acceptance

Broadening the effectiveness, relevance, and utility of  
constructivist psychotherapy

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